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ABSTRACT

Principals from small and rural elementary, middle, and high schools in Texas participated in a 3-year study of the role of the school counselor and the extent of collaborative efforts between counselors and principals. Principals reported a strong dependence on the assistance their counselors provided, often crediting them with assuming the duties of an assistant principal. Most counselors were responsible for the school's testing program and for coordinating student services with community agencies. Counselors were reported as being good listeners; giving good guidance; and being positive and supportive to students, teachers, families, and principals. Counselors provided a thermometer of campus morale in a nonthreatening manner. Principals expressed regret concerning activities that diverted counselors from individual student counseling, such as extra administrative duties, testing, student college preparatory work, and paperwork. When asked about expanding counselors' role, most principals felt their counselors were overextended as it was. Most principals without counselors reported that they assumed the counselor role, and all felt their schools suffered for the deficit. Conclusions from the study were that counselors were in high demand; they assisted principals with many noncounseling duties; and if noncounseling activities were eliminated or redirected to other staff, counselors would have more time for student counseling, which would lead to greater job satisfaction and student productivity. Due to financial constraints, the prognosis is not good for additional help for either principals or counselors; therefore, fostering and developing the relationship between them is critical. (TD)

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Counselors and Principals, A Team Effort:

Small/Rural Schools in Texas

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Counselors and Principals, A Team Effort: Small/Rural Schools in Texas

It should come as no surprise that school counselors are overworked, in high demand, and asked to do many tasks that center on testing and college guidance rather than the basic counseling that many students so desperately need in their lives. A study conducted through the Texas A&M University Principals' Center shows how these conclusions are accentuated in small and rural schools in Texas. This study also sheds light on the relationship between counselor and principal as they work together in the schools to meet the varying needs of students.

The participants in this study were Kellogg Foundation Scholar Principals. The Texas A&M University Principals' Center selected these principals from elementary, middle, and high school small and rural schools in Texas (i.e., schools whose total district student populations are less than 2000) to be a part of a three year study on the effect of the school in the life of a small community. These principals volunteered to be a part of this study to identify the role of the counselor in their schools as well as to identify their collaborative team efforts with their counselors.

The results of the study showed an average enrollment of 305 students per campus. They averaged twenty-two teachers per campus with six support staff members. This latter number included special education, library, and computer lab personnel, as well as nurses and other instructional aides and secretaries.

Of the campuses represented seventy seven percent reported having one counselor. One high school with an unusually large

RC 022001

enrollment of 725 reported having two full time counselors. Twenty-three percent of the schools did not have a counselor at all. In the schools that had counselors, all were assigned full time to their campus with the exception of one K - 8 campus which had to share their counselor with their high school.

More principals had previously served as assistant principals than as counselors themselves. Only one principal reported ever having been a counselor himself. He served in that capacity for eight years before becoming a principal. He felt this experience was beneficial to him because, "I know what is expected of her/his duties and responsibilities." Sixty-nine percent of the principals reported having served as an assistant principal. The average amount of time as an assistant principal was 3.5 years.

Principals were asked to rate their counselors on a scale of 1 - 5, ranging from "Not Beneficial At All" to "Very Beneficial" on a variety of questions. The principals, nearly unanimously, agreed that the counselor's presence on campus was very beneficial. Principals commented on the variety of roles the counselor assumes beyond their basic counseling assignments. There were many varied comments regarding the specific ways in which the counselor benefits a campus.

> "In many ways, she serves as an assistant principal. She does scheduling, sits in ARD meetings in emergencies, handles 'conflict resolution' among most of the girls, handles all testing, in addition to the more traditional counselor duties. She is <u>invaluable!</u>"

> "Our counselor coordinates all special education ARD meetings, state testing and materials, modifications for learning styles, and IEP info that needs to be shared. She

counsels students and sits in on numerous discipline and teacher conferences, etc."

"1. She is able to handle problems before discipline...
2. Serves as acting administrator."

"Testing, individual prescriptive remediation for slower students."

"Support testing administration, provides discipline avenues, student moral, senior transition."

"ACT/SAT prep. classes, financial aid form assistance, eligibility, enrolling new students, testing, counseling."

"Our counselor counsels individual students, parents, and teachers. She visits classrooms and teachers study skills, test taking skills, interpersonal skills, etc. She runs our student mediation program, Saf-T-Net Program (for at risk students), TESA, Drug prevention program, A.D.D. program;"

"1. Record keeping 2. Personal counseling 3. Group counseling 4. Academic counseling 5. Non-threatening contact for both teachers and students"

Principals also agreed the counselor was of strong benefit to themselves personally. Some of the benefits described include the counselor's assuming many administrative responsibilities, such as scheduling, that are cumbersome and time consuming for the principal.

"She is positive and supportive. She handles everything I give her and more."

"Helps schedule, acts as district administrator for ARDs, helps assign tutorials, catalogs all progress reports, keeps six weeks failure list, coordinates testing program, counsels students on academics."

"Does the work of an assistant administrator."

"When I hire a counselor I explain and expect this person to be confidential with me and to be a thermometer for the teachers and campus morale."

"Liaison with teachers--- She informs me of their dislikes/likes."

"She reports child abuse cases and follows up when necessary. She is a great support! I can rely on her to present innovative ideas and programs. She helps me with testing when needed and she listens to me when I need a friend I can trust."

"Record keeping and non-threatening contact for both teachers and students."

All the principals reported that their counselors were extremely beneficial in assisting or directing the campus testing programs.

"The counselor on my campus is the district's testing coordinator. She does it all."

"Coordinates and monitors it all."

"All major testing"

"Is the district coordinator, works with teacher and students."

"She/he is in charge."

"I, as principal, run the major part of the testing program and I attend <u>all</u> coordinators meetings. She helps me with the administration of the advanced placement testing and when a certified staff member is ill during state TAAS testing."

"They coordinate all testing."

The principal's responses were more varied when asked if they would like to see their counselor's role extended. Sixty-six percent said no because they felt their counselors were overextended as it is.

"I think she all ready has more than she can possibly handle."

"No, there's too much to do now - Counselors need more time to actually counsel students."

"If the counselor is doing what is expected there is no time for extensions."

"Not really. Time is limited now."

"I feel our counselor is extended far enough. She is doing her job plus the work that a special education counselor should be doing. Our district does not have a special education counselor. She is doing the work that a special education counselor should be doing."

"Overloaded."

Twenty-two percent felt their counselor's role should be extended, but limited that extension strictly to counseling rather than administrative or desk work.

"More student counseling."

Principals agreed their counselors were overworked in their daily assignments. When asked to describe what they saw as the obstacles to their counselors being their most effective they agreed the counselors simply had too much to do.

"Probably additional duties I give her, like student scheduling."

"Administrative and testing chores. Counselors have become records and testing clerks."

"Too much paperwork."

"Overwork or misdirected tasks."

"Not having background or expertise to do what is needed. Needs to be very, very organized and this is not always a characteristic of counseling types."

"Sharing too much information."

"I believe that I have freed my counselor from major testing duties, etc. so that she can be as effective as possible and she is very EFFECTIVE doing what we feel a counselor should do."

"Paperwork."

While agreeing that their counselors were overworked and often working in areas other than counseling, they also felt they offered support and help to their counselors in a number of ways.

"I give her advice when dealing with a difficult student. I give her unyielding support when dealing with teachers and parents."

"Sit in on most meetings - make joint decisions and referrals on students. We do scheduling, monitor progress reports, assign tutorial;"

"Working together I can provide assistance."

"Guidance, management of time."

"Support administratively for problem, working closely together on all issues, checking each other to avoid mistakes."

"Yes. Keeping her/him up to date on what needs to be accomplished - time line."

"I listen to her innovative ideas, support their implementation, find the resources necessary for materials and training she needs, route important information to her as it comes across my desk."

"Give them more time to work with students."

Going past the ways principals can help their counselors, the participants were asked to describe ways in which their counselor is of specific help to their teachers. The basic responses

centered around testing and college entrance data.

> "She helps disaggregate test data for teachers. She helps students who may be behavior problems with counseling sessions. She teaches students organizational skills which helps them be more productive in the classroom."
>
> "Availability of Texas Assessment of Academic Skills preparation materials, joint counseling sessions with students, discusses modification techniques, fields referrals, dispenses materials to Health, LMS, etc. classes as appropriate."
>
> "Counseling students and providing sampling of testing materials."
>
> "He gets them information to help students in need."
>
> "Counsels student failure."
>
> "Curriculum, testing data information, individual student problems and possible solutions."
>
> "Some one to listen to; Stress, student concerns, knowledge of achievement scores, grades or specifics."
>
> "She helps them by reporting child abuse cases. She listens to their frustrations, guides them in working with and testing A.D.D. students, E.D. students, disruptive students, etc. She uses TESA skills to help teachers improve some of their instructional/classroom management skills. She is support. She visits their classrooms to mediate difficult situations."
>
> "Intermediary between teacher/students."

The principals were also asked how they felt their counselors were of direct benefit to their students. Although they described their counselors as good listeners and sounding boards, little direct counseling intervention was noted.

> "Leadership class, study skills, sexual

responsibility classes, test taking strategies, peer counseling, and much more."

"Working with students. Listening."

"Sounding board."

"Sounding board for problems, reassuring students on their goals and that personally they are OK."

"Just being there when they need someone to talk to. ACT/SAT registration, PSAT etc."

"She meets with E.D. students and other special education students on a regular basis and with others as needed. She trains fifth graders in mediation techniques. She helps plan TAAS pep rallies."

Last, the principals were asked to describe how their counselors were of benefit to the families that make up their schools.

"She has worked with some parents on an as-needed basis, but not regularly."

"Doesn't get a chance."

"Good for public relations in district."

"Would like to see more adult activities/communication."

"Open door policy for <u>any and everything.</u>"

"She works with parents to help them deal with their children in the areas of academic improvement, emotional stability, self-discipline, A.D.D. testing."

Specific questions were asked of the twenty-three percent of respondents who do not have a counselor on their campus. The objective was to discern who fulfills the role of the counselor when there isn't one. Every principal reported he or she assumed the total responsibility for everything a counselor would do.

"Teacher counseling with students during tutoring period regarding academic responsibility. Most of the student trips to the office are really counseling sessions."

"I do for the most part. We have a person doing an administrative internship to whom, as he demonstrates mastery, I will delegate more duties."

Students or teachers who have personal problems have limited avenues of expression in campuses without a counselor. All of the principals report their students and teachers come to them for advice. They also report their nurses and teachers stepping in as listeners or to give advice when needed.

"The nurse help sometimes; She is in the district only two days per week."

"Students usually go to their teachers. Teachers talk with each other and with me. One teacher who is in therapy talks with me regularly."

"They come to me."

"They come to me or our part-time counselor."

In most school districts it is the counselor who acts as the intermediary between the campus and community assistance agencies such as Child Protective Services, community clubs, churches, Department of Human Resources, etc. Principals who did not have a counselor were asked who serves in that capacity on their campuses.

"Child Protective Services representatives contact me when necessary. Alcohol and Drug Abuse presentations are requested and coordinated by me."

"I do. I have represented the school at community luncheons, serve on advisory committees and act as a liaison with government/college entities."

"Our nurse and high school counselor and

principal."

"Lions Club/DHS/Local doctors."

These principals were in 100% agreement that their campuses suffer for lack of a counselor.

> "I am not qualified to adequately administer testing programs, counsel students and teachers, and always be an impartial listening ear."
>
> "Early intervention is critical with our percentage of 'children of promise.' (45% are considered at risk in one way or another.) It would be wonderful to have a trained professional other than the teacher assisting them."
>
> "I am 'stretched' so that while I am performing the duties, I often feel that the quality of the jobs suffer."
>
> "Our students are at a very difficult age."

The principals who did not have counselors were split in half in regard to seeing any hope in the foreseeable future of their campus receiving a counselor. Half reported yes, and half reported no. When asked why or why not, they responded in accordance to their superintendents' philosophies.

> "The superintendent and school board do not think it is necessary; Also, they don't want to spend the money to hire one."
>
> "Declining enrollment, $"
>
> "We are actively searching for a replacement."
>
> "Our superintendent said that we might have one next year."

Counselors in small/rural schools in Texas are reported to assume many duties beyond student counseling. Few principals have served as counselors themselves, making it difficult for them to

understand the intricacies of the counselor's day. Principals report their strong dependence on the assistance their counselors provide, often crediting them with assuming the duties of an assistant principal. Most of the counselors are responsible for the schools's testing program. Counselors usually coordinate student services with community agencies, particularly in the area of abuse. In the absence of a counselor, the principal must do these all things himself. This creates an additional workload for him, outside the realm in which he was trained.

Principals also report the strong benefits counselors provide to themselves, to the teachers on the campus, to the individual students, and to their families. Counselors are reported as good listeners, giving good guidance, as well as being positive and supportive to everyone. Counselors also provide a thermometer of campus morale for the principals in a nonthreatening manner. Another growing area that counselors give guidance is Attention Deficit Disorder. They help the students with coping mechanisms as well as providing direction for the families.

Principals express regret that about the many varied activities the counselors do. Because of this they do not have as much time to spend in individual student guidance and counseling as they would like. Their reactions were varied about expanding the role of the counselor due to the lack of time available. They felt their counselors are over extended as it is. They felt some of the obstacles that used up the counselor's time were extra administrative duties they had given them, testing, student college preparatory work, and paperwork. A few made comments that

indicated they did not feel their counselors were organized or they spent their time in overwork or "misdirected tasks." Another problem sometimes involved counselors sharing too much information with others.

Several conclusions can be drawn. Counselors are in high demand. Several principals report actively looking for certified counselors. Counselors are also spending their time assisting principals with many noncounseling related duties. Principals need more help administratively, and particularly in the area of testing so that their counselors can assume the duties for which they were trained and hired. If noncounseling activities could be eliminated or redirected to other staff, the counselor would have more time available for student counseling. This would lead to greater student and campus productivity and greater job satisfaction for the counselor.

This study reiterates the importance of the counselor in small/rural schools in Texas. All the principals without a counselor reported they felt their schools suffered for this deficit. Counselors were shown to be of benefit to the principal, students, faculty, and families in the community. In exchange for their services the principals talked about the support they gave to their counselors by attempting to redirect noncounseling and administrative duties elsewhere and supporting them with innovative ideas.

Principals and counselors were hired to do two separate jobs. Each group was trained and certified in different areas. But, in small/rural schools in Texas today, it is a team effort by

principals and counselors, working together, to get the job done for students. As long as the budget crisis in Texas school finance continues, the prognosis is not good for additional help for either position. Therefore, it is critical that the relationship between principals and counselors continue to be fostered and developed. Counselors need strong and supportive principals. Likewise, principals depend upon strong counselors to provide for the affective and guidance needs of the school. For any school to reach its' maximum effectiveness, the principal and counselor must continue to work together, hand in hand, each providing the helpmate and soulmate that the other so desperately needs. In the small/rural schools of Texas today, principals and counselors are doing this. Although the job is tough and both are overworked, they still work together.

This study shows the many roles counselors portray in small/rural schools in Texas. These roles are likely to be the similar in small/rural schools across the nation. It reiterates the importance of the interdependence of the jobs counselors and principals provide. In today's changing society it is imperative that counselors and principals continue to work together for a brighter tomorrow.